

Session title: UNCTAD Open Forum

Date: 11 November 2015

Time: 2-3.30 pm.

Workshop Organiser: Ms Mervi Kultamaa, WSIS Coordinator, UNCTAD

Chairperson/Moderator: Mr Peter Major, Chair of the 19th session of the Commission and Science and Technology for Development

Rapporteur/Note Taker: Ms Mervi Kultamaa

List of Speakers and their institutional affiliations:

H.E. Jānis Mažeiks, Permanent Representative of Latvia to the United Nations and co-facilitator of the intergovernmental negotiations on the overall review of the implementation of WSIS Outcomes

Ms Mervi Kultamaa, WSIS Coordinator, UNCTAD

Dr David Souter, Managing Director, ict Development Associates (ictDA)

Ms. Valeria Betancourt, Coordinator, Latin America ICT Programme, Association for Progressive Communications (APC)

Key Issues raised (1 sentence per issue):

Harnessing the potential of ICTs for social and economic development lies at the core of the WSIS, and is inseparable from the talks on the future of the WSIS process.

It is crucial that the overall review should comprehend the implications of the very rapid changes taking place in ICT technology and services, including their impact on society, and that goals and strategies should be adjusted to take advantage of today's technologies.

As well as contributing to the formal WSIS review process, it was important to stimulate ongoing discussion among stakeholders concerning the evolution of the Information Society after 2015, including its implications for sustainable development and governance.

We need to embrace open, inclusive, transparent and democratic approaches to all aspects of the information society, particularly Internet governance, with the meaningful participation of all stakeholders.

While there are different views on some issues, one of the strongest points of consensus in the overall review of WSIS is that governments and non-governmental stakeholders should both have a place at the table.

If there are Presentations during the workshop session, please provide a 1-paragraph summary for each Presentation

Ambassador Jānis Mažeiks explained the process and the progress made to date on the preparations for the overall review of WSIS. He explained that the negotiations on the outcome of the review are entering a critical stage and invited participants to contribute their views and ideas towards the the General Assembly's deliberations. He highlighted two themes that are have gained prominence in the review: harnessing the potential of ICTs for economic and social progress in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; and Internet Governance.

Ms Mervi Kultamaa gave an overview of the main observations in the CSTD secretariat's report "Implementing WSIS Outcomes: A Ten-Year Review", highlighting the need for the review to be undertaken in the context of the evolving Information Society. She also stressed that the objectives for implementing WSIS outcomes today should reach beyond those set at the time of the Summit, not least because of the growing importance of Internet to all aspects of economy, society and culture. She pointed out that the report called for renewed efforts to resolve differences and achieve consensus, and to find solutions that will enable all stakeholders to play their roles and be involved in the development and in addressing challenges raised by the Internet.

Dr David Souter discussed the relationship between the General Assembly's review of WSIS outcomes and the dynamic evolution of the Information Society, including likely developments during the next decade. He explored the challenge of ensuring that the review outcome document addresses past developments and anticipates future challenges in a way that remains relevant in the context of the rapidly changing Information Society. Alongside this, he emphasised the need for stakeholders in the WSIS, IGF and other ICT processes to think beyond the formal WSIS review process itself, to understand the changes which ICTs have wrought in the underlying parameters of economy, society and culture, address new issues of Internet governance which have arisen as a result of the Internet's evolution since WSIS, anticipate likely future developments and develop adaptive approaches towards addressing them. The interaction of these developments would be crucial to implementation of WSIS' vision of a people-centred, inclusive and sustainable development-oriented Information Society.

Ms Valeria Betancourt emphasized APC's commitment to the vision for a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information society which should permeate the outcome of the overall review. Emphasizing access and rights based development in the context of the WSIS review, she urged governments and other actors to invest in human development, institutional capacity, human rights, and democratic, transparent, and accountable governance. She also stressed the importance of women empowerment and ending ICT-based violence on women. Supporting the continuation of the IGF, she hoped that the forum could play a more effective role in informing other Internet governance and Internet policy processes.

Please describe the Discussions that took place during the workshop session: (3 paragraphs)

Several participants commended the CSTD review for its thorough and valuable analysis of the many facets of Information Society development and WSIS implementation.

The value of harnessing ICTs for development was stressed during the discussion as a priority theme in the overall review. Participants urged that the review should give strong emphasis to the

social dimensions of the Information society, alongside technological developments. Issues discussed in this context included inclusive access for persons with disabilities, the need for greater emphasis on the impact of ICTs on education, and their impact on employment.

There was also a call for renewed attention to financial mechanisms, including innovative approaches that could leverage ICTs for social development. In this context, reference was made by one participant to social bonds which focus on training different segments of societies in the effective use of ICTs for employment.

Please describe any Participant suggestions regarding the way forward / potential next steps /key takeaways: (3 paragraphs)

Participants urged those involved in the WSIS review process to build on the evidence base provided by the report "Implementing WSIS Outcomes: A Ten-Year Review", and other relevant documents and outcomes of WSIS+10 processes. They recognised the complex nature of the issues involved, both in the review and over the longer term. They looked forward to the continued discussion of these issues in the IGF, following extension of its mandate, and in other fora.